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Assembly California Legislature



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September 16, 2010

Mark Church
Chair, Seismic Safety Commission
1755 Creekside Oaks Drive, Suite 100
Sacramento, CA 95833-3637

Re: Safety Standards for Gas Transmission Pipelines

Dear Chair Church:

The recent tragic event in San Bruno, where a high pressure natural gas transmission pipeline exploded and the ensuing fire left at least 4 people dead and destroyed an established residential neighborhood, raises a critical question of our preparedness for the next major seismic event.

Of particular concern to me and my constituents is the condition of the hundreds of miles of natural gas transmission pipelines in California, some of which like the pipeline that exploded in San Bruno, are more than 50 years old. As we have recently learned, many of the natural gas transmission pipelines in the bay area traverse earthquake fault lines under high-density residential neighborhoods, commercial districts, and even schools.

Residents who live near high-risk pipelines are anxious to know that they are safe in their homes. Towards that end, I would appreciate if you would provide information regarding the seismic standard required for these pipelines. Are natural gas transmission pipelines in California required, by the Seismic Safety Commission or any other governmental entity, to meet seismic safety standards? If California has seismic safety standards for natural gas pipelines, what are those standards and when were they developed? Are pipes laid several generations ago required to meet current standards for seismic safety? If not, what standard must they meet and is that requirement sufficient for them to withstand a major seismic event?

If California does not currently have seismic safety standards for natural gas pipelines, would legislation establishing standards and requiring compliance with those standards, be supported by the Seismic Safety Commission? Would such legislation be helpful to you in accomplishing your mission?

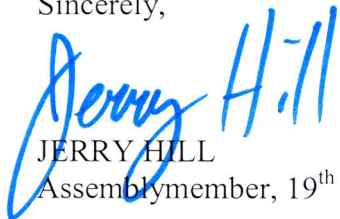


I am deeply concerned that access to manual shut-off valves would be difficult in the aftermath of a major earthquake. As we learned from the San Bruno experience, it took nearly two hours to access and close the manual shut-off valves located along the ruptured pipeline. One explanation I have heard for the slow response in San Bruno was that the technicians had difficulty reaching the valves due to rush hour traffic. I would therefore appreciate any information you can provide regarding expected road conditions and travel times following a major seismic event. In addition, I would like the Commission's feedback on whether automatic or remote shut-off valves would be helpful in minimizing the impacts of potential future high-pressure natural gas line explosions in high density residential neighborhoods.

A local utility is currently undertaking more than \$4 billion in repair work in order to upgrade the Hetch Hetchy water system so that it can withstand a major seismic event. Is a similar effort necessary in order to prevent a pipeline rupture, similar to the one that occurred in San Bruno, after an earthquake?

I greatly appreciate your work and that of the Seismic Safety Commission to ensure the safety of Californians and look forward to working with you to address these issues.

Sincerely,



JERRY HILL
Assemblymember, 19th District